

CIA-Backed Iraqi

Dissidents Killed

*Compare with damage by al-Qaeda
Security Agents Executed*

More Than 100 This Summer

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By R. Jeffrey Smith
Washington Post Staff Writer

More than 100 Iraqi dissidents and military officers associated with a CIA-financed effort to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein were arrested and executed this summer by Iraqi security agents who penetrated the group and unmasked its activities inside Iraq, according to U.S. officials, dissident sources and members of the targeted organization.

The group, known as the Iraqi National Accord, was picked last winter by the CIA as the organization with the greatest potential to unseat Saddam, a long-standing target of Washington's ire, the officials said. The choice was made after Washington became disenchanted with a separate CIA-funded group known as the Iraqi National Congress, whose remnants have been virtually shut down in recent days with Iraq's recent military seizure of the northern Kurdish city of Irbil.

U.S. policymakers made clear yesterday that they have no intention of helping rescue or evacuate around 200 members of the congress who remain trapped in hostile territory in northern Iraq, despite the CIA's past connection to the group. President Clinton declared the United States is helping "those who have worked with us" in northern Iraq's Kurdish enclave, but other officials said Clinton was referring only to Iraqi em-

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ployees of a U.S.-led relief operation as well as Western government and relief officials.

The National Accord, based in neighboring Jordan, was successfully targeted by Saddam in June when "people associated with the group inside Iraq were wrapped up" by Saddam's forces, quashing U.S. hopes that it might be able to unseat the Iraqi president, said a U.S. government official with knowledge of the incident. He attributed the setback to "a failure to maintain operational security."

Saddam's security apparatus scored a similar victory over the National Con-

gress last week by looting and blowing up the group's headquarters in Irbil and hunting down some of its leaders with the cooperation of military forces allied with the Kurdish Democratic Party. The KDP had participated in the congress, but the congress fell on hard times in the past 18 months because of feuds among the Kurds. The KDP broke with the congress entirely and suddenly formed an alliance with Saddam's military forces on Aug. 22.

An administration official defended the decision not to try to rescue the congress members now trapped in the north, saying that the CIA had merely funded the group through its London bank account and had not directed its activities inside Iraq. A team of CIA officers secretly stationed in Salahuddin, north of Irbil, had provided advance warning to the congress of the KDP assault on Irbil, giving them ample time to flee, the U.S. official claimed.

When the CIA team fled to Turkey from Iraq shortly before the Aug. 31 Iraqi and KDP attack, it brought with it the chief of a small group of armed mercenaries that had protected the CIA team and the man's family, the official said, speaking on condition he not be named. Other mercenaries in the protective force were given money, "allowed to keep their weapons, and told to return to their villages," he added. "We handled it as best we could" under pressure from the advancing KDP military force, the officials said.

The official emphasized that the CIA had not been "operating, running or controlling" either the Congress or the National Accord, because of anxieties that such a direct connection would place their members in particular jeopardy inside the country. "It's a stretch to believe" that because the CIA spent millions of dollars to prop up the two organizations and fund their activities, that the agency "now has some special responsibility" for their welfare, he said.

The official went on to reject criticism of the CIA's stance by several Republican lawmakers, saying that the Clinton administration had issued a series of private warnings to the head of the KDP, Massoud Barzani, that "he must take care of these people."

The official acknowledged that Washington's leverage over Barzani is not great at present, because Barzani is now allied with Saddam, but noted that "the glare of public opinion is on him" and "he knows he may want to broker a deal with the United States at some point" if the alliance with Saddam breaks up. He said "I have no idea" what

Washington will do if Barzani turns the National Congress members over to Saddam.

Officials of the National Accord were not available for comment yesterday. But a written statement by the group confirmed that this summer, the Iraqi government had arrested and executed Iraqi dissidents who "are part of the military and civilian organizations . . . that are allied with and coordinating with" the accord. It attributed the arrests to an Iraqi crackdown begun after those involved began unspecified "operations to pave the way for pulling out the roots of despotism in Iraq."

The dissident group's statement claimed that "in addition to civilian elements, brothers in the Army's Air Force were arrested as well as elements from special security [forces], and other heroes from the armed forces." It added that the arrests had been carried out on such a large scale that they "engulfed a number of people" outside the dissident organization that Saddam had wanted to get rid of for other reasons, but that "important cells" within the Iraqi opposition had not been touched.

A senior administration official said that Washington had been able to confirm that the Iraqi government had conducted "widespread executions" last summer of alleged participants in a conspiracy to topple Saddam that was orchestrated by the National Accord. He also said that the group had evidently been betrayed from within.

Saddam was able to penetrate the group in part by monitoring the activities of a courier who carried information back and forth between its sympathizers inside Iraq and its headquarters in Amman, the Jordanian capital, according to several well-informed dissident sources.

The arrests were carried out beginning on June 26, three days after The Washington Post published an article, based in part on interviews with members of the accord group, stating that it had received funds from the CIA and was working "feverishly" to implement a CIA-backed plot to topple Saddam.